
Linking Democracy and Development: An Idea for the Times



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Overview

GOVERNMENT DOWNSIZING, new thinking about development, conducive host-country situations, and strong mission leadership are some of the most important factors prompting USAID staff to link democracy and governance (DG) activities with those of the Agency's other strategic goals. As a result, democratic principles such as participation, accountability, transparency, and responsiveness are now being incorporated into USAID's environmental, health, education, and economic growth efforts.

A study by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE), the Global Bureau's Center for Democracy and Governance, and the Africa Bureau's Office of Sustainable Development finds that DG linkages with other sectors are an emerging development success story. This *Evaluation Highlights* summarizes that study, which drew from interviews at USAID/Washington and fieldwork conducted in the late 1990s at USAID missions in the Dominican Republic, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, the Philippines, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. These missions were selected because they were among the few at the time in which cross-sectoral activities had been under way long enough to have produced results sufficient for analysis.

Two terms are key to the study: *cross-sectoral linkages* and *synergy*. *Cross-sectoral linkages* are

Lessons Learned

- Cross-sectoral linkages can enhance development, producing significant, even remarkable accomplishments.
- The Agency's operating environment and institutional culture are neither conducive to nor supportive of DG linkages with other sectors.
- USAID requirements for performance measurement, results reporting, and review impede DG linkages.
- Government decentralization programs at the local level proved the most productive context for cross-sectoral activities.
- Imaginative and committed leadership is clearly the most important factor in the development of DG linkages.
- The outlook and behavior of mission staff and partners can spark successful cross-sectoral efforts.

elements of program design and implementation that connect activities intended to achieve two or more USAID goals. In this study, cross-sectoral linkages promoted approaches and achieved results in USAID's DG goal area and one or more other goal areas. *Synergy*, the net effect of successful cross-sectoral linkages, occurs when distinct organizational units work together and

achieve greater results than they could independently. In other words, synergy is the added benefit or extra accomplishment that comes about through collaboration.

An example from the case studies illustrates the terms. The health and DG strategic objective teams in a mission decide to work together on health services delivery. The teams use participatory training—an approach developed in a mission-supported DG project—to bring together community representatives and local authorities to plan, organize, and carry out the activity. By using this approach, the mission promotes greater participation among intended beneficiaries, resulting in more people gaining access to the health service than otherwise would have been the case. The DG training improves service delivery because the increased interaction it generates in the community helps local authorities better design and carry out the activity. Added value also comes from those participants who were empowered enough by the experience to get involved in other issues, such as a waste disposal initiative or efforts to improve their children’s schools. The synergy is evident in the better results achieved in both areas: a healthier, more involved citizenry *and* more effective and responsive local authorities.

Background

The application of DG principles and approaches became part of USAID’s expanded post-Cold War commitment to democratic development. These principles and approaches, outgrowths of the Agency’s landmark Democracy Initiative launched in 1990, were further fleshed out in the Directorate for Policy’s 1991 paper, *Democracy and Governance*. In 1994, *Strategies for Sustainable Development* and its

companion *Guidelines for Strategic Plans* linked the promotion of DG even more explicitly to the achievement of the Agency’s overall mission. Thus, DG came to be viewed as both an end in itself and—in anticipation of cross-sectoral linkages—a means to an end in the Agency’s other goal areas, such as economic growth, education, environment, and health.

Despite the commitment to cross-sectoral linkages suggested in these policy statements, the Agency’s operations and culture have not been conducive to collaboration across sectors. For example, as *Strategies for Sustainable Development* was issued, USAID changed its management philosophy from “directing inputs” to “managing for results.” One result was that staff concentrated almost exclusively on activities directly related to their own goals, paying scant attention to activities and objectives in other areas, a phenomenon known within USAID as *stovepiping*.

The drawbacks of ignoring—or at least failing to recognize—opportunities resulting from the natural tie-ins between DG and activities in other sectors were analyzed in the CDIE Impact Evaluation “Democratic Local Governance in Ukraine.” The study concluded that the stovepiping phenomenon prevented these and other programs from achieving their potential.

Subsequently, the Center for Democracy and Governance cosponsored the groundbreaking Conference on Economic Growth and Democratic Governance. The Democracy Center also began a study of sectoral policy reform and DG. In another landmark event, the Africa Bureau’s Office of Sustainable Development became the first USAID unit to establish DG cross-sectoral linkages as a strategic objective.

***USAID’s success in the other core areas of sustainable development is inextricably related to democratization and good governance.
—USAID’s Strategies for Sustainable Development***

Stimulated by these developments, CDIE resolved to examine the evolving relationship between DG and other USAID goals, addressing the following questions:

- Can cross-sectoral linkages enhance development?
- Can DG approaches enhance results in other sectors and help USAID achieve its overall mission of sustainable development?
- Do cross-sectoral linkages occur more readily and with greater success in certain sectors?
- Should USAID promote collaboration between DG and other sectors?
- Is the Agency hindering such collaboration?

Findings

Factors Prompting Linkages

In the missions studied, a mix of factors promoted linkages between DG and other sectors. In all seven missions studied, senior managers supported collaboration between DG and other sectors. In Guinea, the Philippines, and Madagascar, senior mission managers pursued such collaboration after budget cuts and downsizing compelled them to consider doing things differently. Such difficult circumstances, the Guinea director explained, gave him an opportunity to take risks and be creative. “When things are going well,” he noted, “you don’t innovate.”

Mission staff and partners also spurred cross-sectoral linkages. In Zambia and Zimbabwe, mission staff saw the potential benefits of incorporating DG principles in natural resource management projects and took the initiative to put their ideas into practice. In Guinea, the primary change agent was a grantee field representative

who envisioned blending the mission’s economic growth assistance with efforts to increase democratization and improve governance at the local level.

Another factor was the host-country context. Countries in the process of decentralizing—such as Guinea, Mali, the Philippines, and Zambia—offered rich opportunities for collaboration. In the Philippines, for example, the government’s Local Government Code made it possible for the mission to link DG principles and approaches with its economic growth, environment, and health activities. In a different vein, Zimbabwe’s political and economic deterioration in 1997/98 prompted the mission to link DG principles with its economic growth and health programs. The mission believed that improving Zimbabweans’ access to “greater and more equitable benefits” of development would avert crises and help put the country back on track.

Finally, a shift in thinking within USAID spurred DG linkages with other sectors. A growing number of Agency professionals are acting on the strategic assumption that democratization is an intrinsic feature of sustainable development. The Madagascar mission director underscored this point, asserting that “Without democratic development, sustainability of Agency goals cannot be achieved.” In short, USAID staff have increasingly equated democratic development with good development, and this has served as both a rationale and a point of departure for cross-sectoral collaboration.

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Carrying Out Linked Activities

While cross-sectoral linkages are a still-evolving trend, study teams did uncover some patterns in what the missions did and how they did it. For

example, missions established the institutional framework for cross-sectoral work through strategic planning documents, the strategic objective identification process, and organization plans. In six of the seven missions studied, previous and current country strategic plans supported cross-sectoral programming. USAID/Philippines' 1995 strategic plan, for instance, noted that the country's decentralization effort made local governments natural partners in all of the mission's strategic objectives. The mission's March 1999 plan went even further, characterizing DG as the strategy's "integrating force." USAID/Mali's 1996 strategic plan stressed program integration, committing the mission to seek out mutually reinforcing activities between and among sectors.

In working across sectors, missions have also used various formal and informal operational approaches. With the need to consolidate grants and partners and the desire to introduce multisectoral programming, USAID/Mali used joint cooperative agreements funded through its DG, economic growth, and youth strategic objectives. In 1999, such cooperative agreements received a third of USAID/Mali's obligated annual budget. In USAID/Philippines, DG and environment staff jointly funded workshops to engage local officials, nongovernmental organization representatives, and community members in coastal resources management activities.

Mission staff in every country studied underscored the value of joint site visits in cross-sectoral collaboration. In USAID/Mali, for example, DG staff organized field visits with members of the other strategic objective teams. Mission staff said they found these visits highly useful for cross-fertilizing ideas and identifying opportunities for collaboration.

At least twice, missions used retreats to work

out initial approaches to and operational details of cross-sectoral collaboration. Several missions reinforced cross-sectoral collaboration by including it in staff's work objectives. In USAID/Mali, for instance, a work objective of one DG team member and at least one other person in the mission included references to efforts to "reinforce synergies."

Study teams found that most cross-sectoral collaboration took place in meetings and through informal contacts. USAID/Guinea's early cross-sectoral work featured regularly scheduled meetings of an extended DG team. Informal contacts occurred in countless opportunities—from brief hallway conversations to e-mail—of everyday mission operations.

Ultimately, however, it was key individuals who brought together planning and operations to make cross-sectoral activities possible and, over time, help establish

a culture of synergy. In USAID/Madagascar, for example, a succession of mission directors placed a high value on coordination and management flexibility. This helped inculcate a common vision and commitment among the staff, who made cross-sectoral linkages a feature of the way the mission did business.

Linkages Enhance Development

The study found that infusing USAID projects with democratic principles and approaches produced a cycle of benefits. Environment, economic development, education, and health projects not only achieved better sectoral results but also changed the way communities went about solving problems. In some cases, the results promoted democratic governance, creating synergy that promoted USAID's overall sustainable development mission.

Environment was the sector most frequently linked with DG and, on balance, produced the best

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results. DG-environment activities yielded significant results in Guinea, Madagascar, the Philippines, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

USAID/Philippines experiences are illustrative. One municipality in the Philippines was struggling with the effects of deforestation. USAID helped local authorities develop a forest land-use plan, supported by a 90-member committee representing all segments of the community. The democratic processes used to develop the plan helped ensure its success.

As inhabitants became stakeholders, for example, they began to report illegal logging. But the project's accomplishments transcended the environmental benefits. For instance, a municipal planning official, who had been skeptical of the committee initially, said the extra effort it required created mutual trust that made her work easier and more effective. Likewise, a community leader said he came to view the municipal government more positively and was interacting with local authorities in ways he and members of his tribe never had before.

Study teams also found that significant results were achieved by using democratic principles in projects concerned with rural economic development, health service delivery, and parents' involvement in their children's education. For example, USAID/Guinea blended rural economic development with efforts to promote democratic governance and ended up with a project that not only generated close to 230 profitable activities at the project's midpoint, but also improved officials' performance and increased citizen participation. The project provided DG training for local officials and members of rural economic associations. As a result, association leaders started running their groups more democratically and holding government officials accountable. One association

brought about a reorganization of tax collection that increased local revenues; another withheld tax payments when officials failed to follow through on their promises. At the same time, local authorities became more open to citizen participation and more transparent in handling public finances.

Impediments to Linkages

A variety of obstacles have impeded DG linkages. Most notably, the Agency's strategic frame-

work and results reporting and review procedures create barriers between sectors by reinforcing independent treatment of strategic objectives. Because reporting requirements and the review process have no way of readily accounting for activities that cover more than one sector, missions are not getting the credit

they should for meaningful accomplishments achieved through DG linkages. For example, USAID/Guinea's efforts to strengthen economic development groups and local governance made significant contributions to community infrastructure in the mission's health and education sectors. However, these results went unreported because they did not originate under the health and education strategic objectives. Similarly, USAID/Zimbabwe's attempt to make DG a more explicit part of its environmental strategic objective went awry when Agency reviewers in Washington said the information provided was unacceptable because it was not based on natural resources management measures.

Another impediment is that cross-sectoral linkages are not part of the Agency's culture. Employees are judged by the results they achieve in their specific sectors, so there is little incentive to pursue cross-sectoral activities. Even if employees decide to try, they will find little guidance and no clear constituency for such efforts. As one senior

When USAID projects were infused with democratic principles and approaches, a cycle of benefits accrued. The projects not only achieved better results but also changed the way communities went about solving problems.

manager said, linkages are “just not in the lore of the Agency.”

Reduced staff and budgets also hinder efforts to develop cross-sectoral programs. At least initially, collaboration can be labor intensive. Staff cuts mean missions have too few people to handle existing sectoral work. And budget cuts compel missions to eliminate and consolidate programs. Therefore, cross-sectoral activities get limited attention when it comes to designing and executing projects. In addition, funding is often restricted by congressional directives and earmarks, which favor health and environmental activities that have strong constituencies. Requirements attached to the funding, moreover, give staff little flexibility in designing programs involving more than one sector.

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while contributing to democracy and good governance. As a result, citizens have learned how to be more involved in development, exercise their rights, and hold officials accountable, while government authorities have become more effective, responsive, and transparent. On numerous occasions, synergy has been achieved: the sum of sectoral achievements and increased democratic governance were greater than the results achievable independently.

But cross-sectoral efforts have also been impeded by a variety of factors, including narrowly- focused Agency

operations, an unfavorable institutional culture, restrictive performance measurement and reporting requirements, and inadequate personnel and budgets. The successes prove these obstacles can be overcome, but often at the cost of added time and effort for mission staff.

Conclusions

Linking USAID programs in DG and other sectors is an idea whose time has come. Occurring in USAID missions both by design and happenstance, DG linkages have been stimulated by a confluence of factors: reduced budgets and downsizing, committed management, conducive host-country situations, and a growing belief that DG is an essential component of sustainable development. Missions have developed and carried out linked activities through structural, operational, and individual initiatives. Cross-sectoral linkages have become part of missions’ strategic plans and operations, reflecting creative thinking and actions on the part of managers, staff, and partners.

The results from cross-sectoral activities in the missions studied have been significant and, at times, remarkable. Cross-sectoral programs increased achievements in economic growth, education, environment, and health programming

Finally, the evidence affirms the central premise of the study: DG linkages with other sectors can yield better results in both areas. The evidence further suggests that the Agency needs to promote cross-sectoral collaboration, making it an intrinsic part of USAID’s operating environment and institutional culture.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

1. DG Linkages Can Enhance Development

Cross-sectorally linked activities produced significant and, at times, remarkable accomplishments. They have spawned self-reinforcing attitudes and behavior through which citizens and government worked together—often for the first time—on economic growth, education, the envi-

ronment, and health activities. The interaction has produced substantive development results and increased democratization. In short, linking activities produced a synergy whereby the total accomplishment was greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Recommendation: *DG linkages need to become intrinsic to the way USAID does its work.* One way to accomplish this could be to encourage managers—most typically, strategic-objective team leaders—to consider the potential relevance of DG linkages to any activity in their areas of responsibility. Another way might be for staff to consider options for promoting DG linkages in the course of sector assessments, strategy reviews, and program design. Efforts to produce such changes could be spearheaded by the three operating units involved in this study—the Africa Bureau’s Office of Sustainable Development, the Global Bureau’s Center for Democracy and Governance, and CDIE.

2. Obstacles Can Be Overcome

The Agency’s operating environment and institutional culture are neither conducive to nor supportive of DG linkages with other sectors. The Agency’s strategic framework and results management systems create barriers between sectors, generating competition rather than collaboration. Likewise, the Agency’s institutional culture provides few, if any, incentives for cross-sectoral collaboration.

Recommendation: *USAID needs to create incentives for DG linkages and revise procedures to encourage collaboration.* For example, collaboration could be made part of employees’ annual work objectives and DG linkages could be incorporated in country strategic plans. Retreats could be held on cross-sectoral concepts and procedures.

And team leaders could meet regularly to coordinate activities and identify opportunities for synergy.

3. Performance Documentation Procedures Are Failing to Capture Accomplishments

USAID requirements for performance measurement, results reporting, and review impede DG linkages. Failure to measure performance means neither the missions nor the Agency are getting full credit for their accomplishments. Missions have found it exceedingly difficult to develop joint indicators and intermediate results for cross-sectoral activities. Moreover, since reporting and review procedures mirror the Agency’s sector-by-sector program approach, missions have found it hard to communicate about and get recognition for cross-sectoral achievements.

Recommendation: *To improve the overall environment for DG linkages and ensure that cross-sectoral accomplishments can be fully captured, attribution, reporting, and review procedures need to be revised.* The Agency’s annual guidance on reporting, for instance, could stipulate that results of such activities be incorporated in the narrative under each strategic objective. And USAID/Washington’s review procedures could be changed to encourage joint consideration of results by DG staff and those of other sectors.

4. Opportunities Are Present and Tools Are Available

Government decentralization programs at the local level proved the most productive context for cross-sectoral activities. Natural links between Agency programs and decentralization-inspired increases in local government powers and responsibilities provided a continuous stream of

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opportunities for cross-sectoral efforts. The seven missions studied used a variety of approaches and techniques to develop DG linkages, including cooperative funding arrangements and joint site visits.

Recommendation: *USAID operating units need to be aware of the different contexts and tools available to help them with their cross-sectoral efforts. The Office of Sustainable Development and the Center for Democracy and Governance are developing tool kits of information and ideas on how to develop and carry out cross-sectoral activities. Efforts to increase awareness and understanding of DG linkages should build on these initiatives.*

5. Leadership Is Essential

The case studies show that imaginative and committed leadership was clearly the most important factor in the development of DG linkages. In all seven missions studied, senior managers were the key change agents, and their imprint was on every significant aspect of their staffs' efforts to collaborate. Without this support, it is unlikely cross-sectoral activities would have occurred, let alone succeeded.

Recommendation: *The Agency needs to use these and other mission directors with similar experiences to increase awareness and understanding of the potential role for DG linkages. For example, a knowledgeable past or current director could address annual mission directors' conferences in Washington or the field. Or a module on DG linkages could be developed and presented at those conferences and other venues.*

Democracy and Governance and Cross-Sectoral Linkages

Assessment Report

- Linking Democracy and Development: An Idea for the Times (PN-ACG-633)

Working Papers and Case Studies

- Dominican Republic (PN-ACG-600)
- Guinea (PN-ACG-601)
- Madagascar (PN-ACG-613)
- Mali (PN-ACJ-164)
- Philippines (PN-ACG-604)
- Washington Views and Issues (PN-ACG-603)
- Zambia (PN-ACJ-165)

See below for ordering information.

6. Individuals Make a Difference

The outlook and behavior of mission staff and partners can spark successful cross-sectoral efforts. Some key individuals working in the environment area, for example, intuitively understood that DG elements and principles would help them accomplish their sectoral objectives. Others found that discussing activities' synergistic implications at a retreat helped them overcome difficulties in translating cross-sectoral collaboration into action.

Recommendation: *USAID needs to identify ways to help Agency personnel think outside their sectoral boxes. The Center for Democracy and Governance and the Office of Sustainable Development could share the lead role in such efforts.*

This issue of Evaluation Highlights summarizes the findings of Program and Operations Assessment Report No. 29, Linking Democracy and Development: An Idea for the Times, by Hal Lippman of CDIE. The report was based on the seven "Democracy and Governance and Cross-Sectoral Linkages" working papers listed above. All may be ordered or downloaded from USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse (DEC). To download or order publications, go to www.dec.org and enter the document identification number in the search box. The DEC may also be contacted at 1611 North Kent Street, Suite 200, Arlington, VA 22209; telephone 703-351-4006; fax 703-351-4039. Lynda DeWitt prepared this issue of Evaluation Highlights, and International Business Initiatives (IBI) furnished editorial and production assistance.
